

A Study Guide for The Real Christ

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In a world where fewer and fewer topics are taboo for discussion, religion, unfortunately, remains one. One gets the feeling that most religious people are not open minded. We see very little sincere public dialogue about religion. We see cliché, caricatures, laisse faire, rampant ignorance, and banal replies to vague questions on Facebook. If we are waiting for someone to inform us of the truth from the top down, or from the other side of the planet, we may be waiting a long time. Instead of spiritual mud-slinging, we could help each other by sharing our experiences and possibly comparing them (although this is much more difficult). I see many people questioning other people's beliefs, but very few questioning their own. We don't have to worry about losing our faith as we question our beliefs. Beliefs give us something to question, but the Truth will always remain. According to Bernadette Roberts, Faith is God's presence in everyone and can only grow as we seek the Truth. The reason why it can only grow is because Faith is the Truth in us and the Truth is what remains when false beliefs have been abandoned. So don't be afraid to question your beliefs!

As a schoolteacher for many years, I have come to celebrate questions. I don't think there can be a bad question because, in the process of showing what is "wrong" with a question, one clarifies one's thoughts. Most of the following **500 questions** are a little technical. Some are not. Some are questions for spiritual discussion. The idea behind this study guide is that small groups of people can use it to learn (and therefore grow) spiritually.

Three types of groups will probably emerge: The first group of people I will call "**regular**" (for lack of a better word). These people have no philosophical or theological background. They may or may not be Christian. The questions that this group chooses to focus on are questions of comprehension of the text. It is a difficult text (but worth the effort!) so these questions are given to make sure you are understanding what Bernadette wrote. These people are open to an entirely new presentation of Christianity but would probably miss out by setting her book aside after fifty pages or so because they view it as too detailed and too much about dogma (which she was against). Almost all of these questions have correct answers that can be found in the book. Oprah's book club would use this set of questions. Have fun!

The next type of group is those who might enjoy tackling the technical aspects of Bernadette's book. These questions are for the philosophers and **theologians** among us (both professional and armchair). These people almost have to be Christian to have the requisite background to tackle these questions. Present¹ and future seminarians would also be in this group. These people seek the Truth above all else. They love discussing doctrine, and

¹ I understand seminarians in India at least have the courage to do something other than spoon feed themselves the spiritual equivalent of tapioca pudding. They ordered multiple copies of The Real Christ **because** they had read the warning! Good for them! Will other seminarians have the same courage?

the history of ideas. Some of these questions require a little background knowledge or research.

Finally, I hope this study guide can be helpful to a third group of people. These are people actively seeking a deeper **spiritual** life. They may or may not believe in God as a person. They are able to be open and honest with themselves and each other about the spiritual life. They are open to exploring new lines of thought. They come to the group with no agenda other than mutual support and growth in the spiritual life. They realize that time spent discussing the spiritual life is time very well spent. Some of these questions do not have correct answers.

Anyone with an interest in Christianity will find the questions interesting and challenging. Anyone who is afraid of new ideas, or afraid of exploring their beliefs, should read no further. I believe The Real Christ should be required reading for all seminarians, pastors, and teachers of Christianity throughout the world, even if only to show why the ideas are false, because the author was the greatest saint of all time and said, “We’re going to have a whole different view of Christianity if we get it right!”

I **challenge** every English speaker who **thinks** they know something about Christ (and with a paypal account) to answer even **half** of these questions correctly, that is, how the author would answer the question. If the answer is yes or no, some explanation should be given. I will send you one hundred dollars if you can do it before the end of 2020. Submit your answers to www.bernadetterobertsisnotmyguru.com. I will publish the correct answers and send out money in January of 2021. You will need to read the book at least twice. I recommend you throw out all your beliefs first, and then get ready to think **way** outside the box!

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Chapter 3: Introduction to, and Study Questions for, The Real Christ:

Warning, Reason for Writing, and Thesis:

Bernadette was a contemplative first, and theologian second. This is why she writes at the end of the warning that people don't know where she is coming from. She is writing **from experience** and appeals to it **30 times** throughout The Real

Christ. Especially in the second half of the book you will see that her experience was rare. She came to an experiential understanding of Christ while not paying much attention to Jesus. She even says that focusing on the historical Jesus can be detrimental to one's spiritual life.

As you read Reason for Writing, ask yourself these questions:

Regular:

Why does she use the word “spiritual” nine times in these few pages?

Could the case be made that, rightly or wrongly, Bernadette seems motivated to **save** Christianity?

What was a “Protestantizing” move the Catholic church made post Vatican II?

What is anthropopathy?

In what way was one of her reasons for writing to combat patriarchy?

Why do you think she is so careful to make the distinction between Jesus and Christ?

May we infer from the fact that the Shepherd never returned to his flock that Christ is going East with those who leave the Christianity in search of something deeper than anthropopathy?

Does it seem that her motivation is that Jesus be worshiped less or that the Trinity be worshiped more?

As you read the thesis, ask yourself these questions:

Regular:

What Christological conclusion do we arrive at when we remove “but sin” from Paul’s understanding of the difference between Jesus and the rest of us? Aren’t we, too, born without sin?

Can we say that the particular person was the “way” God chose to reveal Man’s destiny?

Theologian:

What mystery do man and the Eucharistic Christ have in common?

Does free will make it impossible for God to be united to any particular person?

Is having the “mind of Christ” a logical consequence of the fact that the Oneness of man and God beyond all self is a hypostatic Oneness that is In God, and therefore known only to God?

Did the human nature God created have to be for itself because God, by definition, creates for no other?

Why can't there be a particular human nature?

Can a person know the hypostatic union or only theosis? Why or why not?

Spiritual:

Can God only be united to what It has created because that is the way It is united - as its source?

Is it merely Bernadette's preference for Plato over Aristotle that motivates her to stress the importance of the Universal Christ over the particular man Jesus? Why or why not?

Can we prove worthy of the revelation of Christ?

Bernadette juxtaposes two different dimensions of existence with the preposition "in". To what exactly does this preposition refer in the phrase "in God"?

Chapter 1: Early Fathers

(Note - If you don't believe Jesus was God, you may want to skip straight to Chapter 17.)

In this chapter Bernadette considers the early fathers and what constraints they were under as they grappled with a correct understanding of Christ and how to present it. She summarizes the development of the Alexandrian and Antiochian Christologies.

She defines what she means by the term “party line”. She introduces what she calls the “theological gem of all times”- Hilary’s three states in the life of Christ. She introduces the conflict between Nestorius and Cyril. Finally, she points out the importance of the Eucharist for all the fathers.

Regular:

How and why is there a fine line between Christianity and Polytheism?

How is the Incarnation a revelation that God creates every soul individually?

Didn’t Bernadette probably intend to write “with impunity” at the end of the section 1. Church Representatives and not “without impunity”?

Is the reason why the Christology of the early fathers tended towards Monophysitism because only the Jews could give to Jesus full humanity and almost all the Early Fathers were Gentiles?

Why, according to Bernadette, is there a fine line between Christianity and polytheism?

Theologian:

Is it appreciably different to say God united Itself to the human species than to say Christ “united the human race through Himself to God”?

Does the desire to attribute no human self to Jesus come from confusing no ego with no self?

What could be some ways that Christ may have affected or changed human nature with the Incarnation?

Did the fathers regard the nature of Christ to be visible?

Is Bernadette committing the logical fallacy known as "*post hoc, ergo, propter hoc*" (after the fact, therefore, because of the fact) when she says that the "end" of the early Christological disputes was the "Dark Ages"?

How much evidence is there to support the idea that the rock bottom basis of their Christologies was the understanding that no human being could be Uncreated, and that the Uncreated could be no human being?

Can Bernadette rightly insist that if Jesus was not fully human he could not have revealed Christ without simultaneously being forced to insist that he must also, therefore, have been fully God?

In order for God to experience the mind-will-consciousness of Jesus, must not God be an experiencer?

Where do we find the most consistency in the presentation of the mystery of Christ - in Scripture, the Eucharistic Tradition, or doctrine?

What evidence is there, if any, to support Bernadette's claim that translators have mistranslated (and/or not translated) many of the Fathers works that they don't agree with?

Spiritual:

How central to the spiritual life is the process of continually eliminating wrong views?

To what extent is our religious miseducation based on a failure to explain the difference between truth and (metaphor or analogy)?

Why might a static, pinned-down view of Christ abort spiritual progress?

Why could the fathers not connect Jesus' soul with their own?

How likely is it that the Fathers attributed to Jesus practically no human soul because of their lack of experience with, and understanding of, the unitive state of consciousness?

Can we say that Jesus was the example of how every person becomes Christ once transformation is complete?

Chapter 2: Philosophical Background

In this chapter Bernadette juxtaposes Judaic monotheism with Greek philosophy and opines that the Incarnation happened when and where it did because each had an important contribution to a correct understanding of Christ. She points out the importance of the Jewish mystic and philosopher Philo of Alexandria (a contemporary of Jesus) and says elsewhere that he

“practically got Christianity off the ground”². She addresses the issues around personifying or not personifying God.

Regular:

What are some of the differences between belief in a personified god and faith in an imageless God?

What would be Bernadette’s response to the atheist who says, “I just believe in one fewer God than you”?

Theologian:

Why did the revelation of the Incarnation happen in time and space at the crossroads of Judaic monotheism and Greek philosophy?

Why might the restoration of the “flesh” have been vindicating for the Stoic?

In light of the fathers’ attempt to clarify what Christ is not, did they have any alternative to pinning Christ down dogmatically?

Spiritual:

Could we say that Christ is the ever-thinning line that both unites and separates reason and revelation?

Could the “new” that the Incarnation ushered in be the growing understanding of the inseparability of matter and spirit, finite and infinite existence?

² DVD’s *Essence of Christian Mysticism, disk 2.*

Chapter 3: *Logos*

In this chapter she deals with the Stoic philosophers Heraclitus and Zeno and their concept of the *Logos*. She also examines how Philo of Alexandria understood the term. She laments its poor translation as “word” and the fact that few if any Christians today have even heard of the term.

For more on Heraclitus in the Axial period, see Armstrong’s book, The Great Transformation. Bernadette was such an admirer of the Stoics that she called herself one.

Regular:

Are there any translations of John’s Gospel into English that retain the original Greek term *Logos*? Where can one buy a copy?

Theologian:

Is part of what the Incarnation revealed the idea that matter is inseparable from spirit? (Otherwise, how could one half of the matter required for conception to occur come from “nowhere”?)

Do we know that the Logos is God’s “knowing” or the “mind” of God because obviously the Incarnation was prepared for by the Logos or God’s plan?³

³ “In the fullness of time...”

⁴ Philo of Alexandria

⁵

Pronounced

Is the *Logos* one with matter in the same way that matter, and spirit are inseparable, or is it a different kind of oneness?

Can we say that the *Logos* is the bond of love “midway between the two extremes”⁴ (of the Transcendent and the indwelling Holy Spirit) serving as a pledge for both?

Compare and contrast Stoic spiritual practice with the Confucian practice of cultivating the virtue of *Ren*.⁵

Were the Stoics pantheists or panentheists?

Is evolution a manifestation of the *Logos* or mind of God?

Could the Incarnation have been the revelation that the *Logos* was already hypostatically one with matter and, therefore, one with humanity?

Is the “great divide” between created and uncreated compatible with Philo’s view of the *Logos* as “Toastmaster of the feast who differs not from the draught he pours”?

Spiritual:

Does God know Itself with the *Logos* because the *Logos* is the Mind of God?

“jen”.

Why might self-awareness preclude awareness of the Logos?

What might a Stoic being “attuned” to the presence of the Logos within look like?

Was the Stoic notion of “charity” a logical consequence of their notion of “apatheia” because the inner flame of love burns outward when not impeded by a fearful self?

How can the cause be in the effect when the effect is in the cause?

Chapter 4: Monotheism

In this chapter Bernadette goes to great length to stress the great and unbridgeable divide between the created and Uncreated which has been bequeathed to us by monotheism. Because God is uncreated, God has no beginning or end. This is a beautiful chapter about her understanding of God and the “saving” work of Jesus.

This chapter could have just as easily been called “Jesus the Jew” In it she gives much of her understanding of Jesus and Judaism. She explains why a correct understanding of Judaic monotheism is crucial for a correct understanding of Christ. She states that Israel does know the one true God. Then she begins to explain the difference the Incarnation made. She concludes the chapter by presenting Christ as the fulfillment of all our longings.

Regular:

Is the eternal oneness of God and Man unique because it is the line that simultaneously divides and unites?

Is “flesh and blood” not able to reveal because the brain is made of flesh and blood and the Truth is beyond the intellect?

Is it ironic that Bernadette defines “the Uncreated” (God) by what it cannot do, namely create Itself?

Was it wise of God to provide the chromosome necessary to create a male who could then HONESTLY affirm “I and the Father are One” as a way to reveal to all of humanity our oneness with God?

Is Bernadette, by emphasizing the “great divide”, advocating a view of Jesus that might be more acceptable to both Jews and Muslims?

Why is there no such thing as Christian Mysticism?

What is the sole difference between Jewish and Christian Monotheism?

Theologian:

May it be said that the line which simultaneously divides and unites is the same line which distinguishes the Divine as experienced by consciousness, and the Divine as not experienced by consciousness?

Why does monotheism, understood in the philosophical sense, hold that the Uncreated Cause can only be revealed?

If a fundamental belief of monotheism is that the Uncreated cannot become the created, then does the “party line” fit within monotheism or not?

What is the difference, if any, between saying, “the soul participates in God’s life” (for so long as God wills it) and saying, “the soul takes its life and existence from God”?

Can the Uncreated exist throughout the created while being Transcendent to it?

Spiritual:

Was the Incarnation the natural or logical consequence of the Covenant God made with Moses on Mt. Sinai?

If “revelation” is the recognition of a Truth one already knows, then how is it different from “realization”?

If God is not near or far, can we say that God is not in the present moment either?

Might there be a subconscious fear of defining God as infinite, independent Existence because we don’t want to confront our own finitude and dependence?

Would it be spiritually healthy for us to remind ourselves frequently that our existence depends on God like a fetus depends on its mother?

Why might God have “wanted” His people to know that they would be eternally one with him?

Do I fear being “snapped up” by God, or do I see it as the fulfillment of my deepest longings?

What would an “atheism in the name of God” look like?

What does it mean to say God transcends all man’s notions of space and time?

Should we think of Christ as the umbilical cord between dependent humanity and the “mother” of our eternal life?

Chapter 5: The Man Jesus

This chapter looks at the man Jesus from a more historical perspective and examines the ways in which he was, and was not, the messiah. She explains how Christianity is a phenomenon and not an institution. She states that the purpose of the incarnation was to reveal that fallible human nature is fallible human nature even if it is one with God. Only a fully human Jesus could reveal that. She explains how Paul made the “diagnosis fit the cure”.

This is the chapter in which she introduces the concept of the primacy of **what** one is over **who** one is. This is also the chapter in which she first explains the ancient worldview regarding the passing on of the father’s fallen soul. She also

introduces the concept of, “how it went for Jesus is how it goes for each of us.”

Regular:

Does undermining Jesus’ humanity in some way undermine our own as if to say we aren’t worthy to be united, as is, “warts and all” to God?

If it is the same process that creates as that saves, then is the only room for sin made in this process the room made for it by man?

What is the most outstanding lesson the Incarnation has to teach?

Should the words “failure to recognize” also occur after “is” and before “one of the important “truths” the Incarnation revealed”?

Why do people give up on knowing God and settle for an idol (or guru)?

Theologian:

Is the reason why to follow is to recapitulate because, as Jesus said, “saying Lord, Lord avails nothing”?

Is our deepening of understanding that each soul is created one-on-one by God, and that no souls are reincarnated, two of the ways the effects of the Incarnation on the world are still in process?

Is Jesus the perfect model for us of someone who chose to become God's own precisely because he was free to be his own person as much as we?

Spiritual:

What is the difference, if any, in saying that Jesus was "God's slave" and saying that Jesus was "God's instrument"?

If the risk of the Incarnation was idolatry, then is the "Jesus Cult" evidence of man's lack of trust and understanding?

Was the "blinding light" seen by Paul perhaps the revelation of man's universal human nature?

Why do we continue to insist that the unitive state is extraordinary when the man Jesus revealed with his "hidden years" that no one knew him as anything other than the carpenter's son?

Chapter 6: Preface to the Trinity

While the Trinity is allegedly the object of worship (not veneration) for Christians, it is also simultaneously dismissed as too mysterious for sustained reflection. Rather than the Trinity being some far off unknowable mystery, Bernadette comes close to saying God can be known in our everyday spiritual lives. This chapter, perhaps for the first time ever, makes the Trinity almost intelligible (or at least a possible subject of discussion). She says there are three ways God has revealed itself to humanity. She distinguishes between knowing God in one's self and knowing God in Itself. The difference is consciousness.

Regular:

Why do the modes of the Trinity reveal each other and not themselves?

Theologian:

Why is it that there is no understanding of Christ possible without first understanding the Trinity?

Why can God not reveal *ad extra* “what” God is not, *ad intra*?

Is Bernadette correct when she says that the Trinity is not unique to Christianity? Why or why not?

Spiritual:

In what ways are the modes of the Trinity the cause of man's spiritual life?

Chapter 7: Trinity

In this chapter she explains the Trinity as the three modes of God's existence. She distinguishes this from Modalism. She continues to explore the distinction between God as known to us and God in Itself. In the end, she outlines the role each hypostasis of the Trinity plays in humanity's spiritual development.

Regular:

How or why can we say that the Cause is in the effect?

What is wrong with the notion of Father as source of the Godhead?

Theologian:

Is the soul ever in a process of transformation because it is united to the Spirit which is united to the Logos and Transcendent whose *modus operandi* it is to transform?

Does consciousness create the distinction between the Logos *ad intra* as God's wisdom and the Logos *ad extra* as cosmic intelligence? If so, how?

How does the Monarchical view of God lead to emanationism and abet a true understanding of the Trinity?

Are the only distinctions to be made between Jesus and the Eucharist (both incarnations of the Logos) time/timeless and particular/universal?

Is the Holy Spirit the dynamism between the Created and Uncreated or is the Logos the bridge between the Holy Spirit and the Uncreated? Or both?

In what way, if any, is the Spirit the union of the Transcendent and the Logos in man?

Spiritual:

Is the reason why there is no separation between body and soul because there is no separation between existence and essence?

Why is there no human being and no human relationship in mystical love?

Chapter 8: The Father-Son Problem

Here Bernadette explores how the Fathers wrestled with the question, “Who is the son? Jesus or God?” She says there was a big switch in the use of the term son from Jesus as son, to *Logos* as son. The line was drawn in the sand first by Arius. It is said that three-fourths of the early church agreed with Arius. In this chapter she makes the bold claim that none of the Fathers held that the man Jesus was God.

Regular:

What was the sole reason for the switch from Jesus as son to the Logos as son?

How important is pointing out the difference between metaphor, analogy, and the literal Truth of something?

Does the Nicene Creed teach that the man Jesus preexisted the incarnation?

In what way was Jesus not orthodox?

Theologian:

How do we know that the incarnation was not understood as God “begetting”, but rather as God “creating” human nature for Itself?

Spiritual:

When we rely on the senses and mistake the metaphor for the literal Truth, do we practice Idolatry?

Chapter 9: Nicaea and Chalcedon

In this chapter Bernadette examines the development of the creedal statements at Nicaea (325) and Chalcedon (451). She agrees with the Chalcedonian formulation because it clearly states that Jesus' human nature was not united to the person of the *Logos* but only to the nature of the Logos. This left him free to be his own person. She explains why she thinks the switch from “hypostasis” to “person” was a disastrous wrong turn. She does not explain when, where, or by whom this switch was made. She explains that hypostasis was used to formulate a nondual understanding of the Trinity.

Regular:

If we are one with God “consubstantially” then what part of us is not one with God - nature or person?

Was Jesus' human nature united to the person or the nature of the Logos?

Theologian:

Is the reason why the term “hypostatic” is problematic because in God there is no above, and no below?

Could the preposition “in”, when used in the context of “the hypostatic union is ‘in’ the person of the Logos” refer to its origin or cause (because there is not space in God)?

When, where, why, and how did the term hypostasis come to mean particular individuals?

Spiritual:

Do we know that the Logos never became an individual being but rather created man’s one human nature because we know that God cannot be circumscribed?

Chapter 10: The Person Problem

In this Chapter she explains where the term “person” came from and what it originally meant. She takes many pages to explain the importance of distinguishing between what one is and who one is. The problem with the term person is we have no other way of understanding the term, other than from the perspective of what it means to be a human person. We are basically making God in our image with the term.

Regular:

Is Christ the oneness of a personless God with personless Man?

Why could Paul not have said, “We are all one person in Christ”?

Why can we **not** say man was made in the image of God?

Theologian:

Is the reason why to persecute one is to persecute all because God is not a respecter of persons?

Was the problem not in saying that nature and person was a union, but rather saying that they were a union that could be separated?

Spiritual:

Do we own ourselves, or is it the job of self to convince us that we do?

What does the mental shift from a person owning a nature to a nature owning a person feel like?

Chapter 11: Person as Self

In this chapter she comes right out and says it. Nestorius was right. To say God was the person of Jesus means that Jesus was not a human person. Yet, Jesus was a union of natures, not of persons. She compares this view to Hinduism. One should bear in mind while reading this chapter that it was written from the perspective of someone who knows from experience that

person, self, or consciousness is NOT of the essence of either God or man.

Regular:

Why is it that if Jesus was not fully human that human nature is not saved?

Did Cyril really “Hinduize” Christianity?

Is Bernadette understanding Jesus and the importance of distinguishing between nature and person from the perspective of, or in the light of living with, **no-self** in this world for decades?

Why is it that the more Christianity tries to deify Jesus, the more it diminishes him and all people?

Theologian:

Is Aquinas helping to prove Nestorius right when he says, “no nature works unless it subsists as a person”?

Would a good place to start for incorporating the study of consciousness into Christian theology be to point out that it is identical to what the scholastics called the faculties of the soul - namely memory, intellect, and will?

Did the Alexandrians not understand the ability of the human subject to act in unison with the divine subject because they had little or no experience with the unitive state?

Can God become a human soul by possessing it? Why or why not?

If **even Cyril understood** that in the Incarnation God only assumed or united Itself to man's common essential human nature, when and how did Christianity lose this understanding?

What are the theological ramifications of the possibility that the “mind” or “consciousness” of God is identical to the hypostasis of the Logos?

How is what nature owns in this life incompatible with eternal life?

Spiritual:

When St. Elizabeth of the Trinity said “let pride starve to death”⁴ (by ignoring it) was she demonstrating the principle that when one takes away the object of consciousness, one thereby sees the subject of consciousness removed as well?

What percentage of Orthodox Hindus and Orthodox Christians really believe that God is a Self in any remotely human way?

Do Christians get Christ wrong to the extent that they give ontological priority to person over common human nature?

Chapter 12: Person vs. Individual

⁴ From “The Greatness of Our Vocation” paragraph 4.

This is one of the more technically difficult chapters in the book because she is analyzing distinctions in scholastic theology. It is also one of the most important because she struggled for the last half of her life trying to get people to understand this distinction - a distinction she knew from experience after her “person” was gone. She has some choice words for Boethius. In this chapter she also explains why one only becomes a whole, fully human person once one enters the unitive state.

Regular:

Wouldn’t it be impossible for God to create a human person because a human being has free will and free will is what creates the person?

If God is imageless, and I am created in the image of God, aren’t I then imageless too?

Is perhaps the reason why Bernadette understands the importance of making the distinction between person and individual so well because she lived for many years as an individual and NOT a person?

How does she explain that, not only was Jesus not God but that Jesus was not Christ? “...simple as that.”

When Bernadette uses the term “theologically” is she referring to the “party line” and not to her experience?

Theologian:

Did Boethius equate “what” with “who” when he equated individual with person?

According to Duns Scotus, why does the actualization of being an individual **not** differentiate the nature or essence, but only person does?

Is the reason why the terms person and hypostasis are at odds because hypostasis refers to **what**, and person refers to **who**?

Is the reason why we know that “how it went for Jesus is how it will go for each of us” because it is the function of the particular to manifest the universal?

Why can one not add up persons?

Is the reason why Jesus as an individual could not have been eternally united to God because God united Itself to what is common to all and which is, therefore, particular to none, including Jesus?

Can a divine nature have a property of a human person? If so, how? If not, then was Jesus his own person?

What is the difference, if any, between being created **as** the image of God and being created **in** the image?

Why can “one divine person” **not** be understood as “one divine being”?

What is the difference between thinking of Jesus as God in person and in thinking of the human person Jesus as being the person of God's own human nature?

Why are references to the man Jesus to a person and not to an individual?

What happens if we substitute the word "species" for "human nature"?

Why is there no Christ outside the Trinity?

Why are the Trinity and Christ gone forever unless we can get past the notion of God as a person?

Spiritual:

Why is it not possible to realize the oneness of my being, existence, and nature with God's Being, Existence, and Nature while still under the illusion that "I" am my person or being?

What are the two different realities that "individual" and "person" refer to?

Is the no-self event the hallmark of going from being a person to being an individual of God's personless human nature?

Why can ONLY God occupy the center of man?

Why is it that only by conforming the will to its divine center that it becomes one with God's will?

What does it feel like to contemplate the difference between essence and person? What can be learned from such contemplation?

Chapter 13: Cyril's Christology

In this chapter she sets up and examines the theological dispute between Cyril and Nestorius. Again, she makes the case that Nestorius was right. She demonstrates that these patriarchs were talking past one another by not heeding St. Hilary's admonition to always consider the distinctions in the 3 stages of Christ. One was basing his Christology by looking at human nature on earth while the other was understanding Christ by looking at human nature in its eternal state.

Regular:

Why is it possible to say "God and man are not 'other' to one another" in a monotheistic context?

How could Bernadette know that Christ's humanity could belong to God without thereby becoming God?

What groups of people don't believe the notion that God acted as Jesus' soul?

Do you think Cyril intended to refer to a being when he said the union of the natures made “one incarnate nature of God the Logos”? Why or why not?

Is Bernadette correct when she says that, “if God acts and looks like a human person then God is a human being” or, could God act and look like a human person and not thereby become a human being?

In what way were Cyril and Nestorius “talking past one another”?

Theologian:

Is standing up for the real Christ simultaneously affirming the unbridgeable gap (in time and space) between disparate natures and the oneness of the disparate natures (outside time and space)?

Does Nestorius’ view that the natures must remain in their own properties agree with the statement from the council of Chalcedon that there is no confusion of natures and that the “distinct property of each nature” is “preserved” in one hypostasis?

Which Christology, the Alexandrian or Antiochian, presents a more exalted view of human nature?

To what extent has the Christology of the Third Council of Constantinople - the human nature being a union of wills or theosis - been sufficiently received by “the faithful”?

What is the difference, if any, between the Incarnate Logos and the man Jesus?

What does Bernadette mean when she says, “God was solely united to Its own created humanity and not to this or that particular human being?

If the dual natures cease to exist when a divine person replaces a human person then is Christianity, as the “party-line” presents it, still Monotheistic? Why or why not?

What are a few problems with the idea that God acted as Jesus’ human soul?

Was Cyril’s main problem that he made God the person of Jesus instead of the nature of Jesus?

Is the Russian theologian Zizioulas attempting to answer Bernadette’s question, “How can God as three ‘individual persons’ not be three beings?” (how or why not?)

Does the Third Council of Constantinople actually teach that Jesus was his own person **and** that Christ is a divine person?

Spiritual:

Is fully understanding why God could never become man itself a spiritual experience? Why, or why not?

What do you feel is more important- your nature or person?

Is it possible for God to “look like a duck and quack like a duck” and not be a duck?

Chapter 14: Monophysitism

She says Christianity today is basically Monophysitic. The belief is that Christ is one divine person with one divine nature. This essentially denies that Christ is a oneness with common human nature “warts and all”. This robs us of hope because it leaves us out. The human mind has a need to focus on one thing at a time and can’t really handle “oneness.”

Regular:

Is it possible that people love God, and love the man Jesus, yet do not know Christ at all? If so, how?

Do you agree that the “party line” is monophysistic? Why or why not?

How does Monophysitism block one’s ability to grasp God’s oneness with man’s common human nature?

In what way, if any, is Bernadette refuting the idea that Christianity is tritheistic?

Theologian:

Why does the unity of man and God not constitute a single being?

Did God perfect human nature by uniting it to Itself?

If the man Jesus was not a human person but a divine person and God is “impassible” (can’t feel or suffer), then **who** experienced his life?

Does Bernadette mean by “human nature” that which exists on earth “warts and all” or does she mean that which essential and not a property of nature (like self)?

How is one supposed to think of Christ as one divine person if Christ is not one divine being?

Spiritual:

Would God create a soul for Jesus that was humanly dysfunctional?

Why is it, exactly, that if one gets the Trinity wrong, one will always get Christ wrong?

What is the importance of embracing our limited, fallible human nature, “warts and all”?

Do you think she is correct when she says that unless we eliminate the term “person” from our thinking and talking about Christ, it is impossible to ever have a true understanding of Christ?

Chapter 15: Communication of Properties

In this chapter Bernadette again hammers home the difference between person and nature. She explores the

possibility that only a person, and not nature, suffers. She objects to the communication of properties because this “way of speaking” has all too much influenced our way of thinking.

Regular:

How does the Communication of Properties rob Jesus of his humanity?

Did Jesus suffer in his person or nature? How do you know?

What was the belief of all the fathers that “blows the whistle” on the Communication of Properties?

Was the initial intent behind the C. of P. to find a way to talk about the divine inspiration of Jesus’ words and actions without actually making him God?

Theologian:

Is it possible to atone to oneself for a sin against oneself?

How might someone defend the C. of P. against the claim that it flies in the face of God’s impassibility?

What is the relationship between the C. of P. and the “switch” in the father-son problem?

Spiritual:

Does God even have attributes?

Why might the Logos have no need to experience Jesus' sufferings to know them?

Chapter 16: The Problem of Christ

It's basically a problem with how the brain functions. That's why the Trinity is a "mystery" because the Truth is not graspable by the discursive intellect. The culprit is the senses. They are adept at feeding information to the brain about discrete individual entities. It's easy for the brain to focus on Jesus. However, in so doing, we focus neither on God nor on Christ. She just wants God to be worshiped. Jesus became the image in which he was created, so must we.

Regular:

Can we regard the man Jesus as universal man?

If the problem of how to make Christ one thing is inherent in the term and in the mind, wouldn't the truth be better served by using the term "oneness" instead?

Did Jesus' nature belong to the person or did the person belong to the nature?

Theologian:

Did God not unite Itself to any particular person and only to universal human nature precisely so that we could securely put ourselves into Jesus' shoes?

Why did the fathers feel compelled to make the oneness of two disparate natures that is Christ one ontological being?

What does it mean to say that the oneness of two dimensions of existence is numberless?

Is one good way to think of the “Third Man” that it is humanity which participates in God?

Spiritual:

Is the reason why Christ is almost a foregone conclusion because God and man are not separable?

Did Jesus become what he was only an image of by giving up his self?

If Christ is the more we are becoming and Christ is not a “who”, then do we become more as we become less?

Does what we are increase as who we are decreases?

Chapter 17: Summary So Far

The first half of the book traces the wrong turns in the development of doctrine that led to the belief that Jesus was God. Because of these wrong turns, she is basically saying that Christ is gone from Christianity. It is lost and unable to be grasped by most Christians today. If you don't believe Jesus was God, you could save yourself a lot of time by beginning to read here at this summary. I suggested to Bernadette that she publish this book

as two separate books, the second one starting here. Obviously, she disagreed. This second half is a spiritual masterpiece and will probably go down in history as the most original work of mystical theology of all time. Enjoy!

She's done it twice already, and three more times in the second half of this book Bernadette refers to Aquinas' "straw". This is a reference to a story near the end of the life of the Dominican Friar Thomas Aquinas that is told popularly among Carmelites and all contemplatives. Aquinas had been working for years on his massive masterpiece of scholastic theology called the *Summa Theologica*. One day, while nearing completion of his life's work, he had a mystical experience of God. In the light of this experience he regarded all that he had written as "straw" and never wrote another word. It goes to show that the life-giving revelation of God does not come through the intellect.

Regular:

What is the problem with equating **who** one is as person with **what** one is as essence?

Does Bernadette say in this chapter that if Christianity was a fig tree Jesus would curse it for its barrenness? Is that what she is doing with this book?

Theologian:

Was there a backlash against Origen's understanding of "son" after his death? If so, why?

When theologians affirm the Logos was “begotten” do they mean in time or in the sense that it is the Eternally Manifest of the Unmanifest and the Form of the Formless?

Spiritual:

If it is the unfortunate legacy of Christianity to bequeath to the world the primacy of who one is over what one is, is the eastern idea that who one is is identical to what one is an acceptable alternative? Why or why not?

How might a Christian/Muslim dialogue benefit from discussing the idea that the Trinity understood as three individual numerical ones implies three embodied beings, or entities?

Is it true that to have the experience of God as the source of one’s being and center of one’s soul and **not** identify that as one’s true self or any aspect of one’s self, one must have a very clear understanding of the mysterious line which separates self from God?

How exactly do Jesus’ human experiences “work” spiritually in everyday life? Do they work by verifying?

Chapter 18: Preface and Incarnation

Although the word “Incarnation” is inadequate because man is more than just “carne” or “flesh”, one way to begin thinking about it is as a “scooping up” of humanity. It looks like universal human nature becoming an individual human nature then becoming universal human nature again. The universal had to

become the particular to reveal the Truth of humanity to humanity. The particular human nature had to die to reveal universal human nature one with God. At the end of the chapter she points to Blessed Duns Scotus as someone who was basically saying the same thing as she, "How it went for him, is how it will go for every one of us."

Regular:

Is the reason all the accidents and properties of an individual person (personality, hair color, etc.) are not eternal because God did not unite Itself to them, or, did God not unite itself to them because they are not eternal?

Is the reason why only man's universal human nature is eternal because God creates no particular human nature and could not unite Itself to a particular human nature (thereby making it eternal) because no such thing exists?

If being a person gives rise to a sense of ownership, wouldn't it stand to reason that to become **God's own** would entail a loss of self? Could anyone possibly understand the terribleness of the Kenosis better than someone who **experientially** understands the difference between a human and divine way of knowing?

Theologian:

Did God imbue our species with immortality at the moment of the incarnation (outside of time) or in time with the conception of Jesus?

Was the relationship between the universal human nature that God created and united to Itself and Jesus' human nature one of cause and effect? If so, is it because the cause is **in** the effect?

Is the reason why the Hypostatic Union must be revealed because it is no one's experience and ultimately beyond experience?

Do we know that, in the end, all are "saved" to the extent that we share or participate in Christ because Christ revealed that human nature has an essential passive potency for assumption and that no human nature can possess a feature that is sufficient to block this assumption?

Was it necessary for God to unite Itself to the essence of man (as opposed to what is accidental⁵) because accidents are (by definition) non-essential and therefore not suited to existence in Heaven "where" everything is (by definition) essential?

Must Christ be united to essence and not accidents because Christ is eternal and accidents (like self) are not?

Can we rightly say that Jesus is to earthly as Christ is to Heavenly?

Could the Holy Spirit have created a soul **not** one with itself from the moment of its conception?

Spiritual:

⁵ Scholastic term for superficial characteristics

Is God's own union with the essence of man's universal human nature not to be found in nature (or creation) because it is in God?

Does Jesus demonstrate what everyone is capable of precisely **because** he was fully human and not divine?

Does our desire to have God be there **for us** after death work contrary to our movement towards existing **for God** alone?

Why is it that to see and know the real Christ is to see neither oneself nor some other?

After **who** we are has been removed, might **what** we are be all that remains to be revealed?

Why might the loss of everything man **knows** about "God" be to "gain eternal life"?

In what ways is man's eternal life **nothing** like his present life?

Is the reason why we know that the way it went for Jesus is the way it will be for us because, in the unitive state, we come to know Jesus' experiences by way of our own?

Chapter 19: Kenosis

As always, Bernadette is writing from personal experience. She writes about her own experience of Kenosis on pages 188 and 189 of *What is Self?* and page 53 of *Essays on the Christian Contemplative Journey*. Kenosis refers to the going from the heavenly dimension of existence to the earthly dimension. It is going from universal human nature to particular human nature. It entails the taking on of human consciousness. Since we get the word from St. Paul, Bernadette starts there. Then she invites us to consider who or what underwent the Kenosis. Then she points out a connection with Theosis. At the end of the chapter she invites us again to distinguish between what is essential in us (and therefore eternal) and what is not.

Just as yin points to yang, Kenosis is also the word Christians use to describe the opposite phenomenon. It is both God's taking on consciousness and our divestment of consciousness or self. God divested Itself to show us that we need to divest ourselves.

Regular:

Why was it necessary for man's universal nature to become an individual person in this world?

Is another word for the reason why anything exists the Logos?

Why was the kenosis not the experience of Jesus?

Theologian:

Is the reason why the Incarnation necessitated a kenosis from being a "what" to being a "who" (ending in human

consciousness) because consciousness is non-eternal and ultimately accidental to nature?

Is the reason why it was an “inhuman” ordeal for human nature to differentiate and become a human person precisely because it is the human ordeal to go from differentiated to undifferentiated, or from person to nature?

Is it because man is a microcosm of the macrocosm that we have this mysterious line within us of our oneness with God which we call the earthly Christ (in time and space) just as there is the Heavenly Christ beyond time and space?

Why is it to think heaven and earth have anything in common to not know human nature?

Spiritual:

Isn’t the unitive state both a state of being and a state of consciousness, and not just a state of being?

When Jesus said, “Blessed are those who believe and do not see” was he basically saying, “Blessed are those who have faith” because Christ is beyond what can be known by the senses?

Why would God want to reveal to us our destiny so much that it would undergo the Kenosis?

What is revealed as our essence after all “accidental properties” (including genes) have been removed?

Chapter 20: Incarnation II

This chapter is less on the mechanics of the Incarnation and more about its meaning and significance for us. She begins with Irenaeus' view of the Logos creating and saving all of creation with the Incarnation. This is called recapitulation. She explores some of what we have learned about ourselves from the Incarnation. She explains why Paul's notion of saving us from sin is incorrect. She explains how it was a message for all of humanity and not just for Jews or Greeks (remember, there were no Christians at the time). Jesus' human nature didn't belong to him. It belonged to God. What we have to realize, on ever more profound levels, is that neither does our nature belong to us.

She writes about the crucifixion being widely misunderstood in this chapter and in her book....

Regular:

Was the purpose of the Incarnation not redemption or atonement, but to reveal Christ?

Could it be that we come to know Jesus' experiences by way of our own because **he is the way** and how it went for him is how it goes for us?

To what extent does Bernadette's view of Jesus take responsibility for our sins off his shoulders and put it squarely on our own?

Why could Jesus not reveal himself as Christ?

Theologian:

Can we say that Jesus is the Logos' own incarnate human nature?

Was the Incarnation a recreation of man?

Is the reason why it was the Incarnation (and not the crucifixion) that was the saving event for man because it is the same process that created Its human nature as that saved it by uniting it to Itself?

Compare and contrast Irenaeus' view of the Logos with the modern scientific understanding of the role D.N.A. plays in evolution.

Does the Logos recapitulate creation every time it recapitulates Jesus' interior life in the soul? Why or why not?

Spiritual:

Is the reason why connecting the Incarnation to sin and wrath is blasphemy because it turns a loving God into a hating god?

Does Christ become the sum of creation by becoming the sum of mankind precisely because the rest of creation already knows it's maker?

What are the implications of focusing more on what we are than on who we are?

Was part of what the Incarnation was about a "blossoming" of beauty and truth into our world because love gives of itself?

Chapter 21: Hypostatic Union

Hypostatic union is the only term Christianity has to describe the oneness of disparate natures (Human and Divine). Two important things to know about this oneness is that it is IN God's dimension of existence and that it is person less. In this chapter Bernadette explains what the Fathers meant when they said that man was born "theocentric". She then juxtaposes the earthly union with the Hypostatic union. The kenosis was the transition from Hypostatic union to theosis. It entailed a "solidification" or condensation of being (not Being) from a Universal to a particular. (For more on the different types of union with God that are possible see her "The Essence of Christian Mysticism, disk one.) She explains why to be transformed into Christ, one has to lose the person that one feels oneself to be. She writes about her conversion experience on p.152 of her autobiography in which she was "informed" that Christ's place in the Trinity would also be her eternal place in the Trinity.

Regular:

Is everything God creates from Itself? If so, why is this not pantheism?

If to conceive is to create and to create is to save, then is to conceive to save?

Did God save us by "thinking" of us?

What is the difference between experiencing God and participating in God?

Theologian:

Why is deification or theosis not a multiplier of Christ? Is it because Christ is not a “who”?

Was it necessary that the human nature born in this world be in the state of theosis because it did not forfeit (completely) the hypostatic union?

Spiritual:

Is the only difference between theosis (or the unitive state) and the hypostatic union person or self?

Chapter 22: Death of Christ

She starts off by explaining why this chapter is not entitled the “death of Jesus”. This death manifests the end of our earthly oneness with God and makes possible our eternal or heavenly oneness. She criticizes Paul’s notion that the death was about being a sacrificial lamb to atone or appease. She distinguishes between physical and spiritual suffering. (more on this in her video, “A Passage through Self”) She explains why Jesus shouted out that God had abandoned him. She is basically explaining the true nature of everyone’s death. She writes about what remained for her after the falling away of the experiencer in chapter six of, “The experience of No Self”) She contradicts the very popular belief that, at death, the soul “pops out” of the body.

Regular:

Is the true nature of death entirely spiritual and not physical?

Could it be that Jesus shouted from the cross that God left him (and didn't keep it to himself) because it was God's will for us that we hear him, and know this?

If the Earthly Christ must die in order for the Heavenly Christ to rise, then does everyone experience the death of unitive consciousness at one's death? Is that something we can all look forward to?

Do most people call the transformation from the Earthly Christ to the Heavenly Christ death?

Does Bernadatte think that most Christians understand the crucifixion correctly?

Does the Spirit transform human nature by consuming the self?

What makes belief in Christ "absolutely meaningless"?

Why, in the end, must trust in God exceed awareness of self?

Is Heaven on earth something we can and should enjoy?

What etymological mistake falsified the true nature of Christ?

Should Bernadette have written, “How is it that Christ can only take the place in man’s punishment, but not **man’s** place in eternal glory”?

Do you think Bernadette was correct when she opines there is skant evidence for the rationality of the soul?

Did she basically prove that the body has a life (and wisdom) of its own by living without a soul for decades?

Theologian:

Could the veil being torn from top to bottom in the temple at Jesus’ relinquishing of self be a sign to us of what the death of Christ really means?

Is the reason why the experience of life and being leaves the body (once transformation is complete) because transformation is killing the experiencer?

Can we say that the body that remains after death is “nobody”?

Must the particular die in order to become the universal?

Is the Spirit the locus of man’s earthly union with God because it is personal?

Is the Logos the locus of man’s eternal union with God because it is (relatively) impersonal?

In what ways is the Logos the true nature of the body's eternal oneness with God?

Are body and soul indistinguishable in the glory of God because matter and spirit are indistinguishable in God?

Is an adequate rationale for the ceasing of the faculties of the soul their fulfillment in God?

Was the reason why Jesus had to “sweat it out” in the garden of Gethsemane because he was like us in all ways including limited knowledge?

Did the nature remain after the “who” had died because it was eternal and did not belong to him?

In her “Essence of Christian Mysticism”, Bernadette mentions that the Spirit is personal for other reasons than the one given here. What might those be?

Was Jesus' feeling of abandonment on the cross possibly **not** because the Father had abandoned him but because the Spirit had once Its work was finished?

Are most Christians unable to follow through with the rational conclusion that there is no eternal self or subject because they mistake the true nature of death as physical and not spiritual? Eg. They mistakenly think a “what” died (and then rose) when, in fact, a “who” died and the Resurrection was the Revelation that the body, in so far as it participates in what God united to Itself (namely, Universal Human Nature) is eternal.

Might the oneness of two disparate natures “look like” occasionally walking through walls?

What percentage of the early fathers countenanced the communication of properties?

Can we say Jesus (the person) is not in heaven because no person is?

Is the reason why nobody recognized him because the Eternal Christ is imageless?

Is the reason we know only Christ rises (and not Jesus) because the true nature of death is spiritual and after the death of Jesus what remained was the universal human nature God created and united to Itself before Jesus (as a person) ever existed?

Is there only one death because only Christ dies?

Was Jesus sacrificed not to atone (like a lamb) but in the sense that the whole thing was scripted by the Logos to reveal he was our surrogate in death?

Did the Ressurection bury the myth of reincarnation because it revealed that, post death, the body and soul are out of space and time?

Did Maximus the Confessor say that, in the end, the soul would die?

Spiritual:

Is the reason why self must die because it was made for this world only?

Is the reason why persons are incapable of eternal life because eternity is NOT just a really long time?

Could Jesus equally well have said, “Unless man lose his experience of life (die) he cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven”?

What would it look like (socially or culturally) for large numbers of people to ignore the differences between and among us (because they are not eternal and, therefore, are essentially irrelevant) and focus instead on what all people share in common (which God did make eternal and are, therefore, very relevant to the spiritual life)?

Does the body not need the soul to animate it because the body has a life and a wisdom of its own?

If the death of the person Jesus was the kenosis necessary for God’s human nature to return to its locus in God, could you say that man’s primary task is to get out of the way?⁶

Does having a center and circumference constitute earthly oneness?

⁶ I had the chance to ask her this question. She replied smiling and yelling, “No! You have to live it out!” Of course, you are entitled to your own answer.

Does not having a center or circumference constitute Heavenly oneness?

What would it feel like to experience neither a within nor a without?

How important is the person if death is the end of all persons?

How important is the body if its essence is eternal?

What does she mean when she writes, “no person is transformed”?

Why do most people tend to think some experience of life goes right on?

Does fear stop us from feeling absolutely at home in the Universe?

Does it make more sense to think that God would take on the life and death of man or only man’s life and not his death?

If duality pertains to consciousness, how could the duality of body and soul exist beyond consciousness in eternal life?

Why are the faculties of the soul “stunned” by the Glory of God?

Chapter 23: Resurrection

As usual, Bernadette has a completely different view regarding the Resurrection than the “party line”. Based on her own experience of the Resurrection, she relates that there is no need to wait for it, not three days, nor until the end of the world. Unlike anyone else in the world, she writes about this experience in many places. On pages 148-150 of The Experience of No Self, on pages 150-153 of What is Self?, on pages 96-99 of Essays on the Christian Contemplative Journey, etc. One good place to start is pages 182-186 “Steps in My Christian Passage” in her book, What is Self? It is the spiritual body that is revealed, not bones coming back together. It reveals the union of matter and spirit that IS Christ. It is a participation in God’s knowing because it’s not personal. Again, appealing to her own experience, she says that to understand the Real Christ, one must first be dead. Death is the beginning of our truly spiritual, eternal life.

Regular:

Do we know that the true nature of the Resurrection is other than the body’s regaining normal functions because all those God brought back to life (by using Jesus) died again anyway?

If it is only what does not die that lives on, then does the Resurrection reveal what lives on after the death of Self?

Is Christ equally the Resurrection and Incarnation because they are both the revelation of universal human nature one with God? (Are these two sides of the same coin of consciousness?)

If the Logos is a oneness of matter and spirit, and humanity is a oneness of matter and spirit, wouldn’t it make sense that Christ,

as the oneness of the Logos with humanity, be a oneness of matter and spirit?

Why is it to think Jesus was Christ to not know the real Christ?

When the historical Christ said, “I am the resurrection” was this a reference to the second or third of Hilary’s three states?

Might the only knowing or wisdom remaining, after man’s way of knowing has been removed, God’s?

Theologian:

Is the reason why there can be no separation of body and soul because the body is united to the Logos and the soul to the Holy Spirit and the Trinity cannot be separated?

Is the dimension of existence that the body dwells in after death revealed as the true body in the Resurrection?

Is the Logos BOTH the true body of the universe, AND the form of the universe that does not appear to the senses?

Did the Resurrected Christ manifest universal man as a particular man only to the extent that it was necessary to do so, and no further? Was that why they didn’t recognize him?

Is the reason why the material body remains unchanged after death because it is merely the body that is known to the senses and an experiencer, and is not the eternal body not known by the senses or an experiencer?

Is it necessary that the Resurrection reveal universal humanity because, without an experience of **my** life and **my** being, the body is no longer my body, but the nature of **everybody**?

Will we all have only the one Body of Christ because after the death of the individual, what remains is only universal human nature?

Why should one interpret the statement “I am the Resurrection” in the light of Hilary’s third or final estate of Christ and not the second?

Does the non-eternal manifest become the eternal manifest as it leaves time? Is that how we become Christ?

Is the reason why nobody recognized him because it wasn’t Jesus but Christ which is not a person?

Is it a formless body because self experiences form?

After the Spirit left him, but before his heart stopped beating, was Jesus perhaps also surprised by the revelation of universal (personless) human nature?

If the “form of man” is universal human nature, wouldn’t it stand to reason that it be one with the Logos or the reason why it is the way it is?

Is the reason why the mind of Christ cannot be known by consciousness because it is the knowing that exists after consciousness has ceased to function?

Spiritual:

Is the reason why we know Jesus did not return to the old creation because the Resurrection did not (and does not) reveal a physical body?

After consciousness dies, is there a way of knowing that can only be described as God's way of knowing?

Why is it that to persecute one is to persecute all, at least in the "eyes" of God?

From a practical standpoint, is the reason why we have to pay much more attention to **what** we are, because Christ is not revealed to **who** we are?

What does it feel and look like to **not** rely on the senses?

Chapter 24: Ascension

In this chapter Bernadette explains why the Ascension has been "downplayed" and is seen as having no relevance for the rest of us. She explains that just as Resurrection was the revelation of the form of God being united to the form of man, the Ascension is that form returning to its home in the Formless. This was manifested by having Jesus disappear into thin air before the

disciples' eyes. She explains what the true nature of this "air" is. One doesn't see the ascension because one can't see the movement of the body to a spiritual dimension.

Remarkably, she is still writing from experience. She writes about her experience of Ascension on page 151 of The Experience of No-Self, on pages 186-188 of What is Self? and on pages 28, 52, and 97 of Essays on the Christian Contemplative Journey. She writes about how it is a continuation of the Resurrection experience. The radically new implication being that it was not just the experience of the man Jesus but one that each of us will soon have.

Regular:

Why was the Ascension essential and necessary for the revelation of the Real Christ?

Will everyone encounter the same truth and reality God revealed as the "way" to eternal life because consciousness is universal to humanity?

Why does man become Christ and not become God?

Is the Ascension the same thing as everyone becoming the Eternal Christ at death?

Is Pentecost a revelation that in God there is no self because it reveals how the Spirit reveals Christ and how Christ reveals the Spirit?

What proof does she proffer that the man the Apostles saw was not the eternal Christ?

Is Bernadette basically saying that because the earliest followers of “The Way” were all Jews, with hopes and expectations of a political messiah, it was practically impossible for them to understand Christ who has no earthly kingdom?

Does Bernadette actually claim that the revelation of the Ascension has never honestly been grasped and that its truth has been totally lost on Christianity?

Is the Ascension further proof that the Incarnation was a manifestation of an otherwise invisible journey to God?

If Resurrection assures man of life after death does Ascension reveal that it is not in time or space?

What was the “content” that the apostles already had that they realized at Pentecost?

In what way are the Ascension and Pentecost two sides of the same coin?

Why does Christ not reveal Itself?

Theologian:

Did the Ascension reveal the Assumption? Or did the Assumption reveal the Ascension?

Was it necessary for God to reveal the Ascension after the Resurrection because God can only reveal the Truth and even man's common human nature has to be transformed into God's own human nature in order to enjoy eternal life?

Was the Incarnation first a movement of condensation of consciousness (through Kenosis) then, later, a movement in the opposite direction of expansion of consciousness through Resurrection and Ascension?

In what way, if any, are Resurrection and Ascension two sides of the same coin?

Was the Ascension proof that Jesus manifested Man to Man because it was the manifestation of an otherwise unsee-able and unknowable bodily experience?

Is the reason why body and soul have the same glorious existence in God because that which gave rise to the experiences of dimensionality (or there being a within) namely consciousness, has been removed?

Does one's body finally experience being filled with the glory of the *Logos* because the veil of consciousness has been lifted? Is the Ascension the end of our (second) kenosis?

Does the "decaying body dwell in unutterable glory" because, done with its property (person), now its transformation into Christ is complete?

Spiritual:

Is the reason why Christ begins where man ends because Christ is beyond person and what is particular to man is consciousness or personhood?

When the Apostles came to know Christ at Pentecost, did they realize that they had known its manifestation all along?

Is the reason why the Ascension is exclusively the experience of the body because, even beyond consciousness, the body has its own sense of being a discrete entity?

Does the intelligence which drives the process of evolution also give to things their reason for being?

How can people learn to think in ways that are not subject to space and time?

What are some of the implications of the Ascension for humanity?

At Pentecost, did the Apostles receive the gift of the “truth-sensor” in man, a.k.a. “Faith”? Isn’t that what Jesus really wanted to give them? Isn’t that why he was created?

Do we become Sophia or God’s wisdom as we participate in God’s knowing?

What will my last experience on earth, the experience of this body being “assimilated” and “dissolved” into God’s dimension of existence, feel like?

Why do you think she points out repeatedly that matter is fundamentally spiritual?

Chapter 25: Deification

On a deep level we are fearful. We fear death. Perhaps the Incarnation/Resurrection is telling humanity that we are already one with God, so that, should we fall, we will not so much as stub a toe. What we are is cared for so much that God always has our back.

From pages 398 to 404 she reviews the huge difference between our earthly and heavenly unions with God. (Technically, union is not an accurate word to describe the Heavenly Christ because It is not two things.) Then she shows that Deification (becoming God) was the goal for all the Fathers. “Salvation is Transformation” was their motto. She explores the inner dynamic at work when one comes to the “fine line”.

Only once there is no longer any person to BE Christ can we say that the human nature has been completely transformed. She explains why it is impossible to be one with Christ. She juxtaposes belief with faith as she makes the point that beliefs are self-fulfilling. The spiritual life is one of becoming more than we are now. It is a continual process of small and big deaths to become this **more**. The final death is not the death of the caterpillar, but of the butterfly. The individual must die to become the universal.

Regular:

Is the reason why it is absolutely impossible for eternal life to be anything remotely like man's mortal life on earth primarily because God is, by definition, beyond time and space?

Is faith in vain only when it has as its object something verifiable by the senses?

In what ways are beliefs self-fulfilling?

What word does Bernadette use to describe "the subtle process of dying"?

Theologian:

Is human nature divinized because the self falls away or does self fall away because human nature is divinized? Or, are both phrases accurate descriptions of a process that occurs simultaneously in our transformation into Christ?

Which is a better definition of transformation - an ontological change or a continual process of large and small deaths?

Why does the process of Christ following us and verifying our experiences happen only after we have caught up with him in the unitive state?

Spiritual:

Is the reason why the ideal humanity is **impersonal** because it more accurately reflects what God united to itself, which is universal humanity?

Are the natural actions of sense and mind stripped away by the presence of Spirit because they were not created for eternal life in God?

Why will we have to transition from knowing and loving God for our own sake to knowing and loving God for God's sake?

Do we create and hold onto the person we become out of fear and need for protection until such time when we acquire perfect faith/trust/love and then the self can leave because it has outworn its usefulness?

Would you rather know Christ or be Christ?

Chapter 26: God will be All in All

This chapter is kind of a continuation of the previous in that it deals with our end. It explores the questions, "Is Christ's eternal kingdom really eternal?" and, "Is God required to maintain Christ eternally?" She ultimately decides that she doesn't know and doesn't care. Once our transformation into Christ is complete, our job is over, and God can do whatever It wants. Lastly, she introduces the very interesting idea that it is we who are being consumed by the *Logos*. This might sound scary like being eaten alive by a monster. But we need not fear because it is our ability to be fearful that is being consumed.

Regular:

Is the reason why self or consciousness must be non-eternal precisely because man exists for God and not the other way around?⁷

What is the difference, if any, between the Truth of God and the Beauty of God?

Practically speaking, is there any difference between saying God consumes human nature so that It can be “all in all” and affirming we are, essentially, “food for worms”?

Theologian:

Is it because man is a microcosm of the cosmos that resurrection (as participation in God’s divine knowing) pertains not only to universal human nature, but also to all of creation?

Why is the transcendence of nature the non-appearance of nature according to Maximus the Confessor?

What is the relationship between God consuming Its own human nature (so that it can be all in all) and the Ascension?

Spiritual:

Is the reason why God must be All in All because self is not eternal? Or is self not eternal because God must be All in All?

⁷ It is not God’s “job” to be an object to consciousness.

Is the reason why one has to be willing to lose God in order for God to finish what It began because God respects the free will it created and, as long as there is something for the self (God as object), God will not be all in all?

Isn't it kind of a bummer that no person (or self) is saved?

Chapter 27: A New Christology

This chapter is about the limitations of human language. God is continually spoken of as if It is three beings. The term Incarnation is inadequate. The words "became" and "begot" are both problematic. Essentially, she finds fault with eleven aspects of the "party line" Christology. She does not outline the details of what a new Christology focused on the Trinity would look like. She merely spells out why it is needed so badly. She invites the reader to think outside the box. Her hope seems to be that a widespread public discussion of the ideas presented in her book will lead to a Christology that is truly Universal. She explains why Christ is not just for Christians.

For some current theological speculation on Christology, Bernadette recommends Karl Rahner's book, A New Christology.

Regular:

What is the problem with saying "God **became** man?"

Can the presentation of the mystery of Christ rightly be claimed as the prerogative of Christianity?

Why must Truth be beyond belief?

How does one miss the very purpose and revelation of the Incarnation?

Was one of the possible reasons God acted as the biological father of Jesus, supplying the genes, to demonstrate that God alone creates every soul (because that was not the view at the time)?

Would most Jews and Muslims agree that Christians are basically tritheistic- belief in three individual (Divine) beings?

Could one say that Bernadette was trying to save Christ from the Christians?

Theologian:

Is the reason why the Spirit cannot transform the body because it has no connection to matter? Is that (perhaps) why the Incarnation happened? (To transform the body)

To what extent is the proposed new Christology a necessary Hellenization?

Would more reference to the dimensions of God (within, throughout, and beyond) better reflect the truth that God is not three beings?

When the faculties of the soul (or consciousness) cease, does the soul die? Why or why not?

Where and when did Cyril say that anyone who believes God can become a human being “has a deranged mind”?

How does the triune Godhead work in man?

In order to avoid thinking of Christ as a person, might we do well to speak of “the oneness of two natures” instead?

What role, if any, did the Spirit’s oneness with the human soul of Jesus play in the fathers’ Christology?

Is the reason why the earliest Christologies were not based on Christ’s oneness with the Trinity because there was insufficient grasp of it for the first few centuries?

Who wrote the final documents at the Councils? Are we sure that we still have them, or might they have been long destroyed?

Spiritual:

If the term “Incarnation” is incomplete and limited because it only refers to flesh, would the term “embracing” of humanity be an acceptable corrective?

Is the reason why we become less free as we put on the “mind of Christ” because that “mind” is the Logos (or Divine Wisdom) which is the intelligence and movement of evolution?

Would an orthodox Muslim agree that it was the switch of persons, from Jesus to God, that made God an individual being?

At the end of consciousness does it feel like the Spirit ceases to indwell (or leaves) because the sense of interiority ceases?

Would visual learners benefit from picturing the human journey as a thick circle that becomes increasingly thin as the Holy Spirit consumes it from within until it vanishes?

If one wants to focus on universal human nature (because one becomes what one focuses on), what does one focus on besides consciousness? Creativity? Humor? Uniqueness?

Is it perfect that the mind is not equipped to grasp the concept of oneness because Christ IS this oneness and can only be “grasped” beyond what the mind is capable of (a.k.a. revealed)?

What would happen if we attempted to omit the four words “me”, “mine”, “my”, and “I” from our vocabulary? Instead of saying “they” could one could say “those of us who...”?

Could we call man a fleeting flowering of consciousness?

Why did God entrust the mystery of Christ to man at all when the risk of idolatry was so great?

Chapter 28: Eucharist

Bernadette begins this chapter by calling our attention to the Jewish origins of the Eucharist. She looks at what the term

“remembrance” meant to the Jews. In Judaism, one keeps one’s loved ones alive by remembering them. She connects the Heavenly Manna with Christ’s glorified body. She says the Eucharist is “where” Heaven is. Understanding what *parousia* (or presence) means is crucial to understanding the Eucharist. She again reviews why one cannot be one with Christ. This may be the most important chapter in the book because it deals with the only practice or technique (although love can never be a technique) or Way of our transformation. It’s a practical chapter. Finally!

Regular:

Given what “remembrance” means to the Jews, was Jesus by saying, “Do this in memory of me” perhaps really saying, “Recreate me, or represent me, so that I can transform you into **what I am**”?

Why is the Eucharist the best way to know Christ?

Isn’t it merely the function of the senses to know what **appears** of the Real and the eye of the soul (or spiritual intuition) to know that which **does not appear** of the Real?

How does the Eucharist assure us that we are one with God? Why is it impossible to be united to Christ?

Did the apostles faith in the real presence grow as they shared their experiences of its effects and realized that the cause was in the effects?

Is to receive the Eucharist to open oneself to be consumed by the Logos?

Do the many become the one when the particular becomes the universal?

Is the Eucharist “where” Heaven is because they are both that which is beyond time and space?

Would the Apostles have believed in Christ’s glorified body if they had not seen it?

Theologian:

Is the reason why the metaphor of the *Logos* as the yeast which raises the dough of the body works because of its connection to matter?

Was Jesus able to correctly say, “this is my body” because he was one with the *Logos* and (technically) not one with the Father?

Why is it that to know the mystery of the Incarnation is to know the mystery of the Eucharist? Does it have anything to do with the one and the many?

Hasn't the Faith of the people and the universal priesthood always been an essential element of the transformation of the Eucharistic Elements?

Is it something different (or the same) for Bernadette to say, "Heaven is where the Eucharist is" and for St. Teresa of Avila to say, "Where there is the king, there is His court"?

Is the reason why the transformation of both the bread and the human body is invisible, because this transformation takes place at the level of essence and not the "accidents" or "properties" of nature?

How is Christ our oneness with God in the Eucharist?

Why is it that "that" in man united to God is not the self?

How is the Eucharist the *Alpha*?

Which of the fathers said, "We shall pass from the grace of faith to the grace of vision when Christ will indeed transform us into himself"?

Does the Eucharist transform the body by changing it into Itself?

Is the Eucharist personless because Christ is personless? Is that why Jesus said, "This is my body" and **not**, "This is me"?

Why is there no difference whatsoever between the mystery of the Incarnation and the mystery of the Eucharist?

In what way is the Eucharist the Logos re-creating and uniting human nature to Itself?

In what way does the Eucharist cause the recapitulation of Christ's life in every body-soul that receives it from **beginning** to end?

Does our daily bread exist on earth as it is in Heaven because of the oneness of the visible with the invisible?

Is celebrating the Eucharist a fervent plea to create and enjoy Heaven on earth because in Heaven we will not enjoy God but participate in God?

Spiritual:

What are the different kinds of beauty that different kinds of people could bring to a group that ritually gathers to break bread, discuss the spiritual life, and pray?

Why was "Eucharist" or "Thanksgiving" the word they used for the Eternal Christ?

Do we become one by eating the many hosts or do we demonstrate our already existing oneness by sharing the Eucharist?

In the Eucharist, is Christ transforming us into Itself?

Is the Christian goal to belong completely to God?

Is there a greater equalizer than the Eucharist?

What does it mean to “attune” one’s self to the Eucharist?

Is it caring for man that causes the Logos to recapitulate its Incarnation in man (thereby making it eternally one with Itself)?

Appendix I: Christian Ontology

Just what you were waiting for- a crash course on the influence of ancient philosophy on Christian theology. She takes particular care to point out the philosophical underpinnings of the ontological switch in primacy from “what” to “who”. She also explains how confusing “person” with “individual” leads to Monophysitism and Hinduism.

Regular:

What is the problem with relying on the senses and positing that material existence is the essence or reality of something?

If it is true that what I am is real, is it also true that who I am is not real?

Are we transformed into Christ individually as we experience our universality on a deep level more clearly and more convincingly?

Theologian:

May we call the requisite change from being God's own universal human nature to being one's own individual human nature (going from a "what" to a "who") the coalescence of consciousness?

How might Christianity look different if the baptism of Plato by the Franciscan Duns Scotus (1266-1308) had been recognized as normative, rather than the baptism of Aristotle by Aquinas?

Is it to say the same thing, or something appreciably different, to say that things participate in some "idea", "form", or "image" of the One?

Can we say that the Earthly Christ is the manifestation of the Idea of Man in the "mind" (or *Logos*) of God? Why or why not?

Is the reason why Aristotle's "contemplative faculty" belongs to God in man because contemplative knowing is a sharing of essences (or participation) and, as Aristotle said, "like knows unto like"?

Do body and soul (in themselves) lack the capacity to see or know God, and it is God's **Own** knowing and loving that is happening? Or, because body and soul are already united to *Logos* and Spirit are they in themselves able to see, and know, and love (three sides of the same coin) God?

Is it only because matter and spirit are already one that the *Logos* is both divine thinking and the object of its thought? Why or why not?

What is the relationship between the commonality of what is one in the many (D.N.A.) and “the real”? Does she hold this view **simply** because she prefers Plato to Aristotle?

Spiritual:

What would it feel like to center prayerful contemplation in the *Hara* instead of in the head?

Doesn’t it seem, even if only intuitively, that we are far too concerned with who we are?

Are we not here to love and serve the Father with the Spirit by being transformed into the Logos? Is this not our “reason for being”?

Appendix II: Theology of No-Self

This appendix is basically Bernadette’s answer to people who say that no-self is not Christian, but Buddhist. She says nobody really understands the Christian Icon of the man on the cross. In a typically confrontational tone, she claims to be Super-Orthodox.

Regular:

How do we know the *Logos* did **not** assume a person in the Incarnation?

How do we know self is a function, and not an entity or being?

Is the reason why the soul is inseparable from the body because it is **not** just the life of the body?

Theologian:

If only the death of a divine person constitutes man's eternal salvation, then what was more important, the death of the body of Jesus or the death of his oneness with God?

Who died on the cross? What rose?

Spiritual:

Is it true that if you are willing to sin, you are already sinning?
Why or why not?

Appendix III: Theotokos

As early as she could remember Bernadette had a thoroughly transcendent understanding of Mary. Mary was never "just" the mother of Jesus. She examines the dispute between Cyril and Nestorius over the term Theotokos (God bearer, or, Mother of God). She does this because she finds in each of their views points worthy of consideration. She says Mary is NOT part of the Trinity, but is the mercy of God. She calls for a more gender-neutral understanding of Christ by saying Mary was just as much Christ as her son. All humans are becoming Christ either slowly or quickly. Recognizing that she was just as much Christ (her Ascension experience we call the Assumption) will help us all realize what St. Paul meant when he said there is neither male

nor female in the Real Christ. Let's face it, many of us, monks and nuns included, have a hard time with this one.

Regular:

Was Mary God's way of revealing universal man (through Jesus) to all of humanity?

If Mary was assumed before her death, is that a revelation of her Ascension because how it went for Jesus is how it goes for all of us?

Which was dispensable to the Incarnation - male or female?

Where did the conception of Christ's human nature occur?

In the history of salvation (transformation), did God **both** provide the male for the woman **and** provide the woman for the man?

We pray for God's will to be done, but whose will did God do in the incarnation?

If the Trinity is "in charge" of transforming **what** we are, is Mary "in charge" of transforming **who** we are?

Theologian:

Is Mary equally the revelation of Christ (the oneness of God and Man) only in a less dramatized way?

Did Cyril **use** Mary to champion the idea of Christ's one divine nature?

In what way, if any, can we say that Mary is Divine Mother?

Was Mary not only the feminine Icon of Christ but also the human being fashioned from space and time to will into existence the manifestation of Humanity to humanity, what we mean to God, as well as the revelation of the oneness of Eternity with our world?

If Christ reveals man's oneness with God, can we say that Mary reveals the mercy or compassion of God?

In what way is Mary God's Own Immanent "Mother"?

Is it contradictory or complementary to say, "Mary allowed the Logos to take on flesh in her womb" and to say, "Mary willed into existence God's instrument"?

Spiritual:

Does the Eucharist both explain how the One can be in the many **as well as** how the many can be **in** the One?

If Mary is revealed as Christ, and then Christ is understood as both male and female as well as neither man/nor woman, is it because, in Christ, there are no distinctions left to be made?

Could we call Mary the Motherhood of God?

Could growth in the spiritual life be likened to learning to walk and then quickly having the courage to run as fast as possible down a hill because you know that if you trip you will be quickly embraced by your loving mother?

Why might it be difficult to develop a deep and abiding spiritual life based on one's devotional feelings around the man Jesus?

Chapter 4: Topics for spiritual discussion

Bernadette could be called the anti-theologian's theologian. (She would disagree with this out of respect for theologians.) She states repeatedly in her book that she has no problems with "the person in the pew". The problem is with theologians "covering their tracks", "digging their own hole" "from the top down", etc. She is certainly against relying on scholasticism. As we have seen, she refers to Thomas Aquinas⁸ realizing, in a mystical experience near the end of his life, that everything he had written was "straw" no less than **five times** in The Real Christ. She would agree with the dictum popular in the Orthodox Church that the real theologian is the one on his **knees**.

Even more problematic than relying on the intellect (at all) for understanding God, is what Bernadette calls "thinking inside the box". Our notions about heaven having space and time and our senses continuing to function "might pacify a five-year-old." If we must think at all about the unthinkable, then we must do so in a far more mature way.

⁸ The undisputed king of scholasticism

She would also say that we must think for ourselves about our life with God, and not let anyone try to interpret our experiences for us or present to us their spiritual worldview. When one reads her Autobiography, it becomes clear that she was constantly trying to make sense of what she was being taught. If it didn't make sense to her, she threw it out. For example, when her father told her that to offend God she had to know she was offending God. Her first thought was, "How can I offend God when I don't even know God?" Later she asked herself who could possibly be less surprised at man sinning than the one who made it possible? So early on she rejected the idea that Jesus died to save us from our sins. She also rejected the idea of original sin, but not of sin (or evil) in general. She could think of no evil in the world for which man was not responsible.

Essentially, we have set our sights too low. In her weekend discussion groups, Bernadette frequently raised her voice when making an important point. There is one word, however, in the many hours of recordings that, in terms of decibels alone, is louder than all others. It is the word "more" in the following sentence: "All the fathers believed man was created to be **more** than he is now." Then she said, "Let me repeat that..."

Why would she practically shout this word more loudly than all others? I think it is because she was all too aware of our tendency to think inside-the-box spiritually. She even went so far outside-the-box as to say Jesus was "surprised" by the Resurrection. How little talk we hear in church (or anywhere else for that matter) about St. Paul's words, "eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has it so much as dawned on man..." or "as far as the heavens are above the earth, so are God's ways above man's ways."

So what is this MORE we are destined to become? It is everything we call Christ. It is beyond who we are now because, in Christ, there is no longer a “who”. All characteristics that divide one person from another are meaningless. There is neither slave nor free, Jew nor Gentile, male nor female. There is just man’s common human nature eternally united to God through the *Logos*.

Our current inside-the-box thinking about our destiny actually does much to keep us spiritually immature. When we set our sights considerably lower than they should be, we feel comfortable, safe, and spiritually complacent. That the spiritual life consists of one radical ontological shift after another hardly crosses anyone’s mind. This is because most of us have not even experienced the first change - entrance into the unitive state of consciousness. According to Bernadette, transformation is only possible **after** this event because only God knows how to arrange things around a divine center. Everything up to this point is reformation, not transformation. That is why it doesn’t occur to us that there is so much **more** that we are becoming. We are spiritual infants who think we are adults. We are caterpillars who think we are butterflies.

It is worthwhile to meditate on the fact that Jesus “voluntarily accepted his own death”. Bernadette posits that, “there may be very few followers indeed”. We lack trust. We are afraid to accept our own death. We want our cake and to eat it too. We offer ourselves to God but then hope to remain intact in Heaven. We can’t have it both ways. Either God will consume us in this life or “the next”. If we choose to allow God to consume us

in this life, it will require an enormous amount of faith that, in the end, everything will be all right, and for the greater glory of God. We think that we can somehow help God by remaining intact. We want to contribute to the Glory of God and feel good about our contribution. In fact, God doesn't need us at all.

Chapter 5: New Vocabulary for the New Christology

As a way of introducing some new vocabulary for the New Christology, I thought I would give a sample response to at least one of the numerous, sometimes interesting, often challenging, and almost always grammatically correct, questions above. I'm not trying to start my own religion or anything (although my Irish, Catholic, superstitious, adoptive, wonderful mother thinks I should!), I'm just trying to set the bar as high above snarky and defensive as I can reach. The question is this one, "What would a new Christology based on a Trinitarian understanding of the Incarnation, or "the Way" look like?"

A new Christology would look like small groups of people calling themselves "People of the Way" (P.O.W.!)⁹ gathering thrice a week to do three things - study, pray, and eat. First, they would read briefly from an ancient spiritual classic such as a book from the Wisdom Literature of the First Covenant, or the Tao te Ching, or the Heart Sutra. Then, they would read briefly from one of the four gospels. Then they would read briefly from a more modern spiritual author such as Maximus the Confessor, **St.** Elizabeth of the Trinity, or Bernadette Roberts. They might sit in silence for five minutes contemplating what they have heard and not

⁹ Or the "Pre-Orthodox Way"?

discussing the readings (that will come later). Then they would ask forgiveness of each other with sincerity.

The prayer part would look like this:

The small group (of at least three people) places one piece of handmade bread (made with love) and one cup (or glass) of homemade wine (made with love) on a small table in the middle of them. They take a minute to recollect themselves. While making the sign of the cross they say, “In the name of the Divine experienced as Other, Within, and Throughout”. Then they recite Irenaeus’ symbol of faith: “God - the glorious Transcendent; the powerful, illuminating and transforming Holy Spirit; the divine knowing and intelligent Wisdom of the Creator and *Logos*, each revelation being the fullness of God” Then they pray these words adapted from the words which Bernadette received from God at her “conversion experience”:

“Christ in the Trinity stands for me and all creation. It is my true and eternal connection to God, the link between God Within and Without. Its humanity is the vessel, the meeting place where God within and without have fruition and become One so that everything created and uncreated is united and One. To know this same fruition as Christ knew it, the vessel must become perfect as It is perfect. Christ is the medium through which the vessel can become one with its content. Transformed into Christ, my eternal place in the Trinity is Christ.”

Then they would pray, “By the union of the *Logos* with each of us, we pray for the universal divinization of human nature. We don’t pray for ourselves, but for each other and the world. We

trust you and we let go of all that appears to come between us. Draw us back to You. Grant us minds and hearts open to You and to each other. Give us Holy Courage to repay the love we have received. Now we lay aside all worldly cares to offer ourselves to You. Living Flame of Love, consume your prey. Hail Mary, full of Grace the Lord is with you, blessed are you amongst women and blessed is the fruit of your womb - Jesus. Holy Mary motherhood of God, pray for us your children, now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

Then they recite these words of consecration slowly, reverently, and three times:

"We continually confess the inseparable oneness of body and soul, matter and spirit. We set aside this bread and wine, for the sacred purpose of our transformation into Christ. Come Holy Spirit, transform these gifts and receive this offering of ourselves that we may belong completely to you, and to each other. In Thanksgiving we receive these gifts and consume them to be consumed by them."

After a moment of silence, they then break from the same bread, dip it into the same cup, and consume the gifts. Then they pass the cup to drink. Then they sit in silence for five or ten minutes to contemplate their oneness with God and with each other.

Then begins the "love feast" during which time the readings are discussed and food is shared. They would pay careful attention to connections between the texts themselves and between the texts **and** themselves. Little time would be spent on small talk. After grappling with the texts in the light of their own

spiritual journey, they would bless each other and return to “the world” to “walk in the Way”. The gathering should take less than an hour, and should be fun.

If “the Way” is realizing our oneness with God and each other on ever deeper levels, then “walking in it” happens most truly when it is difficult. This is because transformation happens in the will. One may be stuck in traffic, or one’s waiter appears incompetent, or one may feel stuck in an abusive relationship. The goal is to maintain one’s inner peace. This is done with the will.

Another example of what this would look like is people greeting each other on the street in the very same way they would most love to be greeted. It would look like showing love non-verbally in myriad ways. We are so creative. Bernadette said there were thousands of ways to sacrifice.

This new Christology, by affirming that all of God is united, not just with flesh, but with the whole of humanity - body, soul, and spirit - would lead to a devotional love and dependence on Mary, the Motherhood of God. It would be understood how she takes care of **who** we are while the Trinity takes care of **what** we are. Between meditating on the ways in which the entire Trinity is united to (and therefore transforming) humanity, and the guidance of Mary to care for who we are as individuals, there would be nothing left undone in our transformation into the Eucharistic Christ which we create with God’s help, or not at all.

So that’s one possible answer. Needless to say, Bernadette probably wouldn’t agree with much of this. She wasn’t my guru. But I don’t think it could cause much harm, and I think it would be

super fun to gather often to discuss the spiritual life. (That's all I want to talk about.) In the absence of hierarchy, rules, bad music, patriarchy, money, sin, guilt, and people telling one what to think, one may find oneself blossoming spiritually in unexpected ways.

Bernadette pointed out that many people go along with their Church on certain subjects, but privately hold very different views on others. Bernadette encouraged people to think outside-the-box and not fall prey to "herd mentality." Basically, the only reason she went to church was to receive the Eucharist (or Holy Communion).

One possible change that Catholics might consider making in this human experiment would be to gather for communion services some days during their lunch break. These can be led by a trained lay person. I suspect most priests and ministers would be happy to train a lay person they trusted to begin holding these services on a daily basis. They can be brief. Usually, there could be a short reading, some prayers, and then communion could be shared. The whole thing need only take fifteen minutes and then one could take fifteen minutes to quiet one's mind, open one's heart, and leave all the worries and cares of the world behind. We could learn to "take a pause for the cause" and be with the presence of God within.

The Eucharist is not magic. It is transformative, but only to the extent that one is prepared and receptive to this transformation. Imagine how much better the world would be if millions of people took 30 minutes out of the middle of their day to open themselves up to being transformed into Christ. From these groups of spiritual warriors, discussion groups on The Real Christ could be formed using the questions provided here, or your

own (probably better) ones. It is a somewhat difficult book, but many heads are better than one.

Eventually, maybe some bishops will authorize the use of the creed developed by Marcelius (which was never anathematized). Maybe a publisher of bibles¹⁰ will have the courage to publish St. John's gospel with the word *logos* instead of the piss-poor translation "word". It would raise some eyebrows, but would also lead to a fruitful line of inquiry.

Someday, in the Catholic Mass, when people pray, "we proclaim your resurrection" it might be done **not** as an affirmation of the divinity of Jesus (as if the resurrection was some kind of proof-text to cite to non-believers). **Rather**, it would be prayed as an affirmation of **our own** glorious spiritual body destined to live forever in God. It would be an affirmation of this body's transformation into Christ's mystical body. Proclaiming his Resurrection is less about him than it is about us. We cannot be reminded of the fact that Jesus reveals man to man enough. (On the other hand, since only Christ rises, the Resurrection is all about Christ, and not about **us** at all.)

Part of our new vocabulary should be to return to the Pauline presentation of human nature as a union of body, soul, and spirit. The spirit is not the Holy Spirit but that part of man that contemplates God. (I think Aristotle called it the Passive Intellect?)

We **collectively** will become Christ in the heart of the Trinity (not we individually).

¹⁰ *Ignatius Press?*

People who embrace the thought of Bernadette are either already courageous or must become so. There is no place in the truth of what is in store for us as individuals for any fear of losing the self. You cannot serve both God and mammon. You have to choose between the Truth and your self. The “Good News” of Christ will have to be refashioned from referring to **who** we are as persons being saved from the consequences of sin to referring to **what** we are becoming beyond ego and eventually beyond self.

There is no blessedness and no blessed. This certainly doesn't sound like “Good News”. In fact, Bernadette's insights basically pull the rug right out from under the spiritual longings of most people. Most people only turn to God in times of need as a refuge. Bernadette is saying that God doesn't care about “you” at all. God has the work of transformation to accomplish in you, and, come hell or high water, God gets what It wants. God wants **what** we are to be united to It eternally.

So, once we let this sink in, how does it affect how we live our lives? Bernadette relates that she felt a sense of relief when she realized that God didn't care about her, because it left her free to be herself. God made it perfectly clear to Bernadette (at age nine) that It was not ever going to be there at her beck and call. She did relate that Mother Mary had always been there for her and that it is Mary who cares for **who** we are.¹¹ If we have the Divine Feminine to care for us on our journey, isn't that enough?

Nevertheless, the idea that **who** we are is not eternal is a tough pill for most to swallow. Some people will be severely challenged by the idea that religion is not a matter of rewards and

¹¹ She even said that she had to be careful about what she asked for from Mary, because she always got it.

punishments. Swami Vivekenanda even claims that it is impossible to have a religion without belief in an afterlife. All karma is instant in that it pertains to this life only. So if God is not a person, and Heaven is not a place, and Jesus is dead, and “I” won’t get to enjoy any of them, what’s left? We surely have each other for this short time. We also have our source and our end, the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, among us in the Eucharist. We have one chance only to be fully human, to live without fear because we know we are already one with God. And we are already one with each other. We don’t have God at our beck and call. God has us. But we do have each other and the Motherhood of God. If love is the source of the universe and has demonstrated that we are worthy of eternal life as a species, could it be that we are destined to be far **more** than we are? We don’t know what we have in each other as gift because we don’t know what we are. We are a mystery to ourselves. But I will help you bring out the best in you and you will do the same for me. Thank you. You are welcome.

Once we realize that we are all we get, we will love each other spontaneously and unexpectedly. Do you really need to stick around forever to enjoy some pie in the sky, or isn’t that enough? Enjoy what you have while you have it. Seize the day. Live fearlessly because, if Bernadette Roberts was right, this is all we get. “One shot you got!”

Make it count.